

DECISION RECORD

SHOSHONE-EUREKA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

FOR FIRE MANAGEMENT

EA# NV61-EA97-071

INTRODUCTION

The Battle Mountain Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management is amending the Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan (RMP) to allow a change in fire management within the Shoshone-Eureka Planning Area. The change in fire management is necessary to move from full suppression or modified suppression to re-introducing fire as an integral part of the ecosystem by allowing up to 21,000 acres per year to be treated. This figure includes acres burned by wildfire use under appropriate management response (5,900 acre/year 10 year average), acres burned using prescribed fire, and acres treated by mechanical means. The goal of 21,000 acres was brought forward from Phase 1 of the current Fire Management Plan.

Environmental Assessment (EA# NV61-EA97-071) analyzed the potential impacts of the Proposed RMP Amendment for fire management and the No Action alternative. The No Action Alternative analyzed the continuation of current fire management direction. With minimal exception, this calls for full suppression of all wildland fire. While the fire management direction in the No Action Alternative conforms to the existing RMP, it does not meet the purpose and need for reducing hazardous fuels and using fire as a tool to meet management objectives.

DECISION

It is my decision to amend the Shoshone-Eureka RMP to proceed with the components of the Proposed Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan Amendment for Fire Management as described in the Proposed Action Alternative. Implementation of the RMP amendment will be through site-specific activity or project plans, in accordance with Fire Management Implementation Procedures detailed in Appendix 2.

Selection of the Proposed Action Alternative adds the option of using fire and other fuels reduction or modification treatments as tools for managing public land within the Shoshone-Eureka Planning Area. Implementation of the RMP Amendment/Proposed Action will restore fire as an integral part of the ecosystem in order to improve the diversity of vegetation, reduce the incidence of hazardous fuels, and to reduce potential danger to suppression crews and the public. The long-term desired result is a healthy ecosystem characterized by a good distribution and proportion of successional stages such as would occur over time under a natural fire regime.

Fuel treatments of up to 21,000 acres may be done within the Planning Area per year. This figure includes the 10-year average wildland fire acreage (5,900 acres/year) where an appropriate management response has been taken, and prescribed fire, along with mechanical treatments to reduce hazardous fuels. Standard Operating Procedures will be applied for all wildland fire use, prescribed fire use and mechanical treatments during implementation (page 13, Approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan Amendment for Fire Management and Environmental Assessment # NV61-EA97-071, August 2002).

Guidance for emergency fire rehabilitation is found in Section 1742 of the BLM Manual. Emergency fire rehabilitation measures to prevent accelerated soil erosion and establishment of noxious weeds are incorporated. Fire line rehabilitation would include restoration of surface contours and closure to vehicles.

The Proposed Action does not negate the need for full suppression for the protection of life, fire fighter safety, protection of property and natural and cultural resources. Human-caused wildland fires, such as escaped campfires, arson, and vehicle fires, will continue to be suppressed.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING

When necessary as identified during the development of implementation plans, mitigation and monitoring requirements for actions implementing this RMP Amendment will be incorporated into the site-specific analysis for each action.

Mitigation measures adopted through the 2002 Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan Amendment for Fire Management and the Environmental Assessment (Amendment/EA) are:

- **Air Quality** will be managed according to the principle strategies for managing smoke from prescribed fires (Amendment/EA, pages 17-18).
- **Riparian** prescriptions and activity plans will be written to ensure state water quality standards are maintained. Riparian area burning will be restricted due to the limited amount of riparian acreage found within the Planning Area. Where perennial water sources occur, vegetative treatments other than fire use will be seriously considered. Water quality sampling stations may be required to accurately analyze the quantifiable impacts to water resources. (Amendment/EA, page 20)
- **Vegetation** treatments in B category areas below 6500 feet, will have prescribed fire primarily as a part of an integrated treatment plan involving mechanical or other treatments and other management actions to protect from invasion of non-native invasive species and from livestock grazing. Fencing of burned areas may be necessary to allow desirable plant species to become established. (Amendment/EA, page 27)
- **Weed** prevention and abatement treatments will be developed and analyzed for site-specific projects. The Plan Amendment states that in most instances burned areas will not be available for grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons to allow vegetation to recover, thereby limiting the chances for noxious weeds to become established in the burned area. (Amendment/EA, page 29)
- **Forestry** mitigation actions stress that seed collection areas identified by Native Americans in pinyon pine stands will not be modified to the extent that pine nut collection is adversely affected. It also states that in mixed conifer sites where fuel loading is high, mechanical thinning will be done prior to re-introducing fire. (Amendment/EA, page 35)
- **Range** resources for grazing may be restricted in burned areas through fence exclosures. Each treated site will have a specific grazing plan developed to allow for establishment of desired plant species. Supplemental re-seeding to meet range management objectives may be done. Other mitigation actions may be developed during the site-specific project planning process. (Amendment/EA, page 37)
- **Wild Horse and Burro** habitat within a herd management area will not be allowed to burn extensively. Burning will be restricted during the peak foaling period of March 1 through June 30 each year. Should a water source be cut off from wild horses or burros by a fenced burned area, an alternative source of water will be provided either through piping water to a point along their normal grazing to water route or by developing a new water source outside the fenced area. Emergency gathers may be required if treatment or rehabilitation efforts disrupt areas routinely used by wild horses and burros. (Amendment/EA, pages 38-39)

- **Cultural Resources** will be protected through actions identified in the site-specific analysis. Fire crews will be encouraged to use existing roads, when possible to minimize impacts to cultural resources that might be caused by off road travel. (Amendment/EA, page 47)

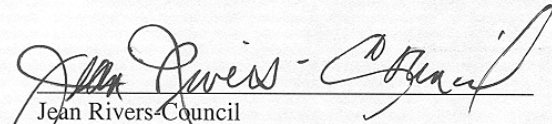
RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

I base my decision on the analysis contained in the 2002 Approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan Amendment for Fire Management and Environmental Assessment # NV61-EA97-071.

Implementation of the Proposed Action will restore fire as an integral part of the ecosystems within the Shoshone-Eureka Planning Area. Where fire would not be a good management tool, the Proposed Action calls for fuels reduction by mechanical means. The Proposed Action is expected to reduce fire fuel hazards, improve diversity of vegetation, improve wildlife habitat, reduce the chances for establishment of invasive non-native plant species and improve the ecological condition of the range.

Based on the analysis in the EA, it was determined that impacts from the Proposed Action, with the associated mitigation measures, would not be significant. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

The Governor's consistency review revealed no known inconsistencies with State or local plans or policies. (letter of July 11, 2001)


Jean Rivers-Council
Acting State Director, Nevada

Date: 17 September 2002